

Old soldiers never die

ZHUKOV

By Otto Preston Chaney.

David and Charles. 535 pages. £4.50.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgi K. Zhukov is probably Russia's best-known soldier; certainly he is the ablest field commander it has so far produced. His part in the victories of the Great Patriotic war so closely rivalled Stalin's that in the postwar years the cult of personality required a tortuous rewriting of history in order to excise Zhukov's name completely. Zhukov is a particularly rewarding subject for the biographer, since his career has been one of startling contrasts. When the war ended he was the foremost soldier in the Soviet Union, weighed down with decorations and honours, on the verge of an important peacetime political career guiding the development of the Russian armed forces. Yet twice in postwar years he has been disciplined by the party and driven into obscurity. Each time he has made a comeback, though less a result of his own unaided efforts than of the twists and turns of political life.

This is the first full-length study of Zhukov; his own autobiography, published in translation here last year, ended tantalisingly in 1946, on the eve of his first tumble. Colonel Chaney has done the best possible job in the face of the vicissitudes which beset historians of Russia, and this highly enjoyable book will probably remain unsurpassed for many years. Making full use of the memoirs of Soviet generals which have been appearing of late in journals and periodicals, as well as of Zhukov's own memoirs, he charts a rise from sergeant in the imperial cavalry to marshal of the Soviet Union. The landmarks are well known: the siege of Leningrad, the defence of Moscow and then of Stalin-grad, finally the desperate last stand of the Third Reich before Berlin.

Zhukov's wartime career is ably described, but for general readers perhaps the most interesting part of the book deals with the years after 1945. Zhukov's eminence lasted only one year, and in July, 1946, he disappeared from the political scene, shortly after having been voted a deputy of the Supreme Soviet. It seems clear that he was becoming an over-popular, and therefore in Stalin's eyes over-mighty, subject. His expertise was too valuable an asset to be wasted, however, and he began to re-emerge during



Zhukov: able and too popular

the Korean war. For two brief years after the overthrow of Malenkov in 1955 he again occupied a position of importance, but departed again in October, 1957, when Khrushchev became alarmed at the growing independence of the army. Since Khrushchev's own departure in 1962 he has gradually been rehabilitated yet again; it is tactful, therefore, that the west should be reminded of what Russia achieved against the Third Reich under Zhukov's guiding hand.

Sec. 4.01.2 Zhukov
P - Chaney, Otto P.